

An hour after the sun should have arisen and hadn't, when the songs of the mating birds had begun to quiet and they were pursuing the daily quest for sustenance, the brooding having not yet begun, on the kind of a day that is not congenial to people but is essential to the fullness of Spring and the survival and health of wild life - a clammy, wet morning with a dew so heavy it was just short of rain - there was another proof of the inexplicability of this year's violent and unblame of Nature.

When it was light enough to see, I had gotten the morning paper, fed the geese, and returned to the house with five of the six cats defying my feet. Within minutes each was settled in a spot of his liking, four abed with Lil and Magpie, the sedate and docile pater familias curled in my armchair. Twinkletoes, the half-grown female, was more pestiferous than her usual persistent pestiferousness, demanding from the lap that my fingers abandon the paper ~~for her~~ and scratch her head and ears. Only her unbound affection, so unaffectedly inflicted, her almost exultant demonstration of love, makes her attentions tolerable until, tiring of the joy of the stroke of her body or, perhaps, sated like a requited lover, she settled down to a silent sleep in the security of valley of my crossed. raised legs.

Five silent cats at peace with life and the world, asleep during the day's best hunting hour, when the birds are about and aground searching for their own food, five peaceful "predators" whose unnatural lack of aggressiveness makes a garish contrast with the advanced and perfected society of man emblazoned on the front page with the flaming hell in Vietnam, the rapes and robberies of the city, the foibles of the exalted ("Malaysia's Prime Minister made a confession today: The pnoies were his undoing."), and the Russian orbiting of the moon with a spacecraft that played back its national shthem while another news story detailed the starvation rampant in the Indian subcontinent.

It was a normal day in the crazy world man has mixed up, a world in which death and suffering - all needless - are heralded ^{as} ~~and~~ manifestations of the highest and most sacred of human emotions, of his acceptance of responsibility, of his concept of honor, a characteristic of his species alone.

reportage

As the daily ~~dose~~ ^{XXX} of mayhem and more advanced demonstrations of man's superior civilization receded in the back pages into the pontifications of the editorial page, already outpaced by the ~~news~~ speed of events, the matinal celebrations of the birds also receded in the silence of their daily work as they scouted the emerging bugs and larvae and the scant growth of the beginnings of their "new Year, the renewal of life.

A new sound intruded itself: the polite, subdued call of a meowing cat, so quiet. almost suppressed it was impossible to place.

Through the glass of the back door is the panorama of peace in Nature.

A dozen feet away, on the other side of the fence, sparrows twit about among the oats offered the geese for supper last night but refused in favor of the succulence of the fresh season, selecting this grain and rejecting that with the ostentation of Mammon in the midst of plenty. Below them down the steep hill are the geese, picking on the tough rye crusts I have thrown them more for their pleasure than their need, rolling their bodies intermittently in the ruffling warnings of the season as they automatically heed the stirrings of their wild past and warn all others to keep a proper distance while they indulge their taste for this new delicacy so foreign to their past. A single mockingbird struts the lane behind the door, houseward of the happy sparrows and sedately superior in the solemnity with which he regards the fine grit midst the limestone of the car tracks, alternating his study of it with his calm examination of me through the window. He hopes a few fearless steps and pecks at the ^{dainties} ~~delicacies~~ that he finds and enjoys but are invisible to man. Leisurely and at peace he flicks around, occasionally flashing the white in his feathers as he leaps rather than flies to a perch in the middle of the

fence, deigning the five-foot high top in favor of ^{the} a lower roost from which, perhaps, he can more closely scan the abundance - his abundance - in the lane. Then, entirely unafraid, he hops down and feeds again, this time but six or seven feet from the door.

Only infrequently does he look at the human face studying his un-wild behavior, his utter lack of fear, his complete composure even as the face moves to better watch the conducts of the geese who periodically punctuate their dining with the shrill calls of the season, their exclamations that are so cacophonous to man's ear but so dulcet to their own compelling his attention. Here is the true peace of the world. Almost on the doorstep the single tranquil mockingbird, the daily ~~visitor~~ uninvited guest; the motion-prone smaller brown sparrows luxuriating in the abundance left them by the geese, interrupting their greedy ~~gorgings~~ gorgings to preen their slate-gray breasts; then the emotion-possessed honkers, crying their passion as they fill their craws; while deep in the meadow the awakened groundhogs saunter from their dens in the ground where the topsoil is deepest and search for the uncurling heads of the clover that is just sprouting, yet halt in their quest every few steps, raise up on their hind legs and with an alertness foreign to fat natures, sense the air for the nonexistent dangers their heritage compels them to fear.

There is no sun. The sullen sky is low, its gray almost white, its promise of rain, while necessary, is unwelcome to man who equates beauty with radiance. The mien of the day is dull. Yet in the harmony of the animate life, it is a glorious day.

The mocker goes about his studious business, the sparrows flitter and
 chew
 feed, the geese honk and ~~feed~~, and the groundhog cautiously dashes about, somehow
 even
 seeming graceful/as the loose reddish-brown fur flops around in a drooping pouch soon to be filled with clover-fed fat. Here indeed is peace in the agreeableness of the more primitive creatures, in their harmonious coexistence, as there is in the beauty of the scene, if not in man's eye at least in his mind. Here is the spirit of the world to which man in his ultimate development and understanding still only aspires.

For a moment the concord of the view is jarred as ~~the eye follows sudden~~
~~motion~~ sudden motion captures the eye, which follows the bobbing white of a rabbit's tail as it speeds from a wild bramble into a den in the berry patch. The untrusting rabbit, fast yet unhurried, disappears into his thicket and the mind is comforted with the supposition he is restored to his loved one after an ample breakfast.

Then there is another intrusion upon the peace, a faint ~~scratch~~

scratching coming from the bottom of the door and a meow so quiet it seems to be dreamed. Tiptoeing, I can see the sixth cat, Mr. Bibbs, reaching upward, his eyes beseeching entrance, stretching as though to be held through the solid door. I open it and he rushes in, ignoring me as he speeds to the plate upon which the cats are sometimes fed the supper remains. It has been cleaned and he examines the floor around it, hoping one of his family was careless. Finding nothing, in the midst of a perfunctory arch-back rub against my leg he suddenly remembers the kitchen, and he lopes off ~~the~~ to comb the floor for an unswept morsel. Finding none he returns and resumes his leg caress in mid stroke, silently pleading to be picked up, twisting silent his head in supplication and flashing as he did the one white spot on his otherwise solid black body, an underchin patch that suggested his name. He is hungry, for both food and affection. I give him the latter, cradled in the left arm and accompanied by the contented purr that vibrates from his body.

Suddenly a strange ~~xxxxxxxx~~ realization startles me. Here is this half-grown cat, his growth needs making him even hungrier, who had refused to even try for the normally sppetizing mockingbird so enticingly close to ^{his station} ~~the position~~ at the door, yet not a single pass had he made. He had suppressed the rumbling demands of his hunger and nature, preferring hunger to the killing of this self-tame bird, his natural prey! Not even for sport had he made an effort to

catch the bird. And the bird, entirely unafraid, had so completely ignored the cat, his natural enemy, recognized by the long instinct of survival, that I was quite unaware of Bibbsy's presence until he had quietly demanded entrance, so slightly he was almost ignored, ~~almost~~ as though he hesitated to make a sound loud enough to disturb his normal quarry.

Here indeed was an editorial! Not the kind one finds in the newspapers,
unneeded
where slaughter is dignified as the expression of pride or the requirement of "honor". Here, in the suppressed proper instinct for killing, ~~as~~ urged as it was by Nature and need, is the true sermon on life.

The cat and the bird were more eloquent than the learned journalists.